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ABSTRACT

In the decade since the World Food Conference of 1974, increased attention has been directed to the problems of world food security. The emphasis on technologies of production, while important, have not sufficed. Two major shortcomings of the World Food Conference and the efforts it stimulated were (1) the failure to recognize the relationship between poverty and food insecurity and (2) the failure to view national and household food problems within a larger framework of food systems. The harsh realities of this situation are that there are governments in some developing countries that are corrupt or incompetent and place a higher priority on political security than food security. Moreover, some developing countries lack the natural or human resources to develop and sustain economies in which most of the populace will have income adequate for purchasing adequate food. Finally, food aid cannot sustain the kind of activities which will alter the effects of pervasive poverty. On the positive side, a number of factors show promise for improving food security. These are the fact that there are enough resources in the world to feed its people, public programs can help subsistence farmers, and with current knowledge it is possible to devise national food sector strategies. (LP)

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WORLD FOOD SECURITY AND INSECURITY, 1974-84

Martin Kriesberg
Washington, D.C.

March 1985

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WORLD FOOD SECURITY AND INSECURITY, 1974-84

By Martin Kriesberg*

Introduction

The quest for world food security is as old as biblical times. In the book of Genesis, Egypt's Pharoah asked Joseph to interpret his dream of seven fat and seven lean cows. Joseph's interpretation and advice were to store up grains in the good years so there would be adequate supplies during the lean years which would follow. The advice was good then, and the biblical story goes on to suggest the importance of food supplies in projecting a nation's power. The problem of food security remains and takes on a special urgency as we witness the spectacle in much of Africa where drought, political unrest and population increases brought millions to the brink of starvation. The 1984 World Bank Report and the UN Conference on Population in Mexico the same year focused on the question of whether the world can feed itself by the year 2000 (only 15 years away).

In seeking to answer the general question of adequate food supplies over the next 10-15 years, and of food security, it is useful to review the progress of the past 10 years. The World Food Conference was convened in November 1974 in response to food shortfalls in many parts of the world and a precipitous decline of cereal stocks accompanied by a substantial increase in commodity prices. Food insecurity was very much on the minds of the conference participants. The Conference resolutions urged greater priority by governments and international agencies on food and agriculture, with increased resources aimed at improving production, particularly in needy countries.

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The Conference proposed a wide range of specific actions and institutional arrangements for increasing food supplies. The assumption was clear: if more food was produced more people would eat better.

Seeking food security by greater assistance for food production

The decade since the World Food Conference records very substantial increases in external assistance to strengthen food production in developing countries. Since much of the assistance provided by donor agencies, both bilateral and multilateral, has required counterpart funding of some kind, we may assume that developing country priorities and budgetary allocations followed that of external agencies.

The international development agencies generally accepted the resolutions calling upon them to undertake new and expanded activities. Expanded program budgets were approved by governing bodies. Thus, the multilateral organizations became the principal executing agencies for World Food Conference resolutions. Annual levels of resource commitments for selected two-year periods during the decade, indicate significant increases for the food and agriculture sector by international development institutions that provided financing. For the period 1973-74, they committed US$ 1.6 billion; for 1978-79 their commitments rose to US$ 4.7 billion, and were higher still in 1982-83 at an estimated annual rate of US$ 5.6 billion.

Among the International agencies specifically concerned with food and agriculture, gains were even greater. (See table 1). FAO's overall program budget, which was US$ 212 million for the biennium 1973-74, rose to over US$ 1,000 million some 10 years later. The World Food Program, the UN/FAO food aid agency, had an overall budget for the 1973-74 biennium of US$ 259 million; commitments for the 1983-84 biennium were set at US$ 1,135 million.

Table 1 Official Commitments for Food and Agriculture,
DAC Member Bilateral Agencies, and Multilateral Development Agencies,
Selected two year averages, 1973-1983

	1973-74	1978-79	1980-81	1982-83	82-83 over 73-74 (% Change)
Bilateral Agencies	1,425	4,335	4,206	4,300 1/	207
Multilateral Agencies	1,835	5,723	7,233	7,072	290
•International Banks and UNDP	1,563	4,737	5,947	5,638	280
Specialized •Food and Agriculture Agencies 2/	272	986	1,292	1,434	420
Total bilateral and multilateral	3,260	10,058	11,439	11,372	
% multilateral	.56	.55	.63	.62	

1/1983 Amounts are estimated

2/This category includes the international agencies specifically concerned with food and agriculture: FAO (regular and special funding),WFP,IFAD and CGIAR

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was established with initial resources of US$ 1.0 billion over 1978-80 with an additional US$ 1.1 billion replenishment for the period 1981-83.*

Among international financial institutions and many food deficit countries there emerged a new recognition that the food and agricultural sector is the foundation for overall economic development. This philosophy, long held among agriculturalists, became conventional wisdom among a wide range of specialists and institutions concerned with international economic affairs.

During the years 1973-74, multilateral agencies had directed some 28 percent of their resources to the food/agriculture sector, but in the years 1977-78 the proportion increased to 40 percent of total commitments and this level has continued during the two-year period 1982-83. The corresponding proportions of assistance provided by bilateral aid agencies to food and agricultural development were: 12 percent, 17 percent and 16 percent.

* Of course by the end of 1984, the future for IFAD seems less robust than it did two years ago.

Furthering food security by food aid

For the decade since 1973, food aid has been an important factor in overcoming food insecurity and meeting some of the food emergencies that have occured. There have been several important trends in food aid direction during the years, 1973-83. While the value of food aid as a proportion of total official development assistance (ODA) has remained unchanged in most of these years, more food aid has moved through multilateral rather than bilateral channels. Multilateral food aid was about 16 percent of total food aid in the years 1973-74 and this proportion has risen to about 25 percent in the 1980's. A significant number of countries receive multilateral food aid (mostly through the World Food Program) who are not recipients of P.L. 480 commodities.

The international Emergency Food Reserve (IEFR) was established as a separate vehicle to enable the WFP to respond promptly in emergency situations. Donors have met the IEFR annual goal of 500,000 tons of grain during recent years. The U.S. and other food aid donors have also responded to the urgent needs of African nations during these years with additional food aid, exceeding the IEFR target levels.

News stories of food shortages and starvation often report on food aid as meeting emergencies. The World Food Conference saw food aid in that light as a temporary, short-term need. But increasingly, both bilateral and multilateral agencies see the need to use food aid as a resource for development. The U.S. has long included self-help measures as part of its concessional sales and grants of food. In recent years provisions for self-help were explicitly included as part of a new Title III under the P.L. 480 legislation. Underlying the current philosphy is that only by greater self-reliance in production can low income, food deficit, countries improve their food security.

Also, food aid is increasingly being used as an adjunct to changes in public policies designed to encourage greater production and consumption. The WFP has moved a larger proportion of its assistance into development related projects directly concerned with improving food security over the longer term. For the two year period, 1981-82, over 70 percent of its assistance was used in connection with agricultural and rural development projects.

Sharpening the focus on countries of greatest food insecurity

For many years the concern about "world food problems" tended to be global in nature with little focus on the countries or regions where the situation was particularly severe. "Global" concerns failed to reflect the significant differences among developing countries, either as to their ability to grow the food they needed or to earn foreign exchange to pay for food imports. But in the early 1970's several events occurred which focused world concern more clearly on the countries and regions where food insecurity was most acute.

In 1973-74 there were poor harvests in a number of developing regions and in the Soviet Union also. Cereals stocks were drawn largely through commercial sales and the increased price of grain, as well as petroleum products, starkly revealed the countries which were most vulnerable and least secure in their food supplies.

Developing countries were unable to pay for higher-priced grain, oil, and other imports; they were "most severely affected" by the economic dislocations of the 1970's (and the worldwide economic recession of the early 1980's). Using this new designation of "most seriously affected (MSA)" countries, the World Food Council and some other UN bodies helped focus world attention on development needs of the "food priority countries."

The concept of "food priority countries" helped clarify the nature and locus of the world food security problem. While there were different views on which countries should be included in any list for special attention, there was widespread agreement on the essential characteristics of countries for whom external assistance toward greater food self-reliance should have high priority. Most are also on the UN list of "least developed countries".

During the period 1974 to 1983 the focus of food insecurity shifted from Asia to Africa. A continuing period of drought in the early 1970's and encroachment of desert, brought hardship to people and their animals across a wide stretch of Africa's Sahel. The countries comprising the Sahel were food priority countries and the international community did respond accordingly. Working together through an ad hoc body, the "Club du Sahel," donor countries and international organizations sought to co-ordinate efforts and aggregate resources to bring a greater focus on food self-reliance to the countries of the Sahel. In the early 1980's similar adverse weather, political instability and population growth have led to present food and agriculture disaster over a larger portion of the African continent.

As crisis followed crisis in several other regions of Africa during the decade, the depth of food problems there have become clear: most African countries merit food priority attention. Their identification as most needy continues to the present.

The flow of international assistance, particularly food aid, increased. Africa is receiving a substantially larger proportion of total assistance in the 1980's than in the 1970's - but dollar targets set by international financial agencies for food and agricultural development were not always attained.

In its review of major development issues before the UN system, the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) focused on food and agriculture during its Geneva meeting in July 1983. Reports from representatives of UN agencies at the session indicated clearly that more attention and resources were going to the countries where food insecurity is greatest.

However, while there was an appropriate identification of the countries that needed most assistance to overcome food insecurity, there was a failure to deal adequately with the indigenous problems and with the kinds and quantities of assistance needed. The increased food aid offered was a natural humanitarian response to the plight of large numbers of hungry people in Africa, but there is, not yet an adequate effort to deal with the underlying factors responsibile for food insecurity.

Although major donors, profiting from experience with the Club de Sahel, did take counsel together it was more to divide up the needy countries in line with donor interests than to work out a comprehensive and concerted effort. At the same time, the political instability, bureaucratic incompetencies, and the absence of policies that would better address their problems remained stumbling blocks in many of the most needy countries.

Food Production Increases

Except for Africa, the decade since 1974 records substantial increases in food production by developing countries as well as developed countries. Over the 10 year period 1973-1982, index numbers of food and agriculture show that increases among developing market economy countries were about 37 percent or 3.2 percent on an annual basis. On a regional basis Latin America and Asia did better than the average; Africa did most poorly (see table II). During the ten year period, overall food production in Africa increased only 1.8 percent a year, while population grew 2.8 percent annually.

The production record is better for the "food" category than for "all agriculture" in each of the regions, reflecting priorities for food self reliance in many countries. The record on per capita production in basic food and feed grains among developing countries of South Asia, East Asia, the Near East and Latin America indicate significant gains in the past decade. Yields per hectar, while increasing in all developing regions, were higher in Asia and the Near East than in Latin America and Africa. The first two regions faced limitations on arable lands and turned increasingly to the application of higher yielding technology including fertilizers. Latin America brought new land under cultivation and part of the increased production in the region is explained by more extensive cropping. The category of MSA or food priority countries, including some in Asia as well as Africa, recorded better gains on yields per hectar than those in Africa as a whole.

Table II

Production of Major Grains by Regions, 1974-83

Regions	1974-76 average	1977-79 average	1980	1981	1982	1983 preliminary
	- - - - - - - - - - - (million tons) - - - - - - - - - - -					
TABLE A - WHEAT PRODUCTION						
Latin America	15.9	13.9	14.9	14.8	19.3	19.5
Africa	5.0	4.4	5.5	4.4	5.0	5.2
Asia (incl. China)	108.0	127.7	129.9	142.0	141.1	140.3
Developed countries	251.7	276.6	294.7	292.4	301.2	290.0
Eastern Europe (incl.USSR)	109.2	128.8	127.7	106.3	113.1	115.0
World Total	382.9	422.6	445.0	453.6	466.6	455.0
TABLE B - COARSE GRAIN PRODUCTION						
Latin America	51.9	57.1	57.8	74.7	71.8	72.0
Africa	35.4	34.8	34.7	36.1	35.5	36.0
Asia (incl. China)	140.3	140.8	149.4	151.9	150.7	153.0
Developed countries	446.0	507.6	476.0	522.7	536.7	490.0
Eastern Europe (incl.USSR)	183.8	185.2	133.4	125.7	141.1	150.0
World Total	673.6	740.3	717.9	785.4	794.7	756.0
TABLE C - RICE PRODUCTION						
Latin America	13.8	14.3	16.3	15.4	16.8	16.5
Africa	7.8	8.1	8.2	8.6	8.5	8.5
Asia (incl. China)	315.3	346.2	361.4	373.6	368.6	373.5
North America and Western Europe	7.0	7.1	8.3	9.8	9.5	9.1
Eastern Europe (incl.USSR)	2.2	2.3	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.6
World Total	347.2	378.6	397.5	410.8	406.6	410.9

SOURCE: FAO, Food Outlook Statistical Supplement, March 1983, and Commodity Review and Outlooks 1975-1983. World totals include production from some countries not included in categories shown.

* The reduced production for 1983 in wheat and coarse grains is principally attributed to adverse weather and adjustment policies in the U.S. affecting harvests that year.

Enlarging The Concept Of Food Security

By the early 1980's, it had become clear that increasing food production alone would not assure world food security. The concepts of food security and insecurity needs to be reexamined.

The FAO, in a 1975 paper outlining an "International Undertaking on Food Security," noted that food security and insecurity operated on three different levels: the household, the nation and the world. In that paper FAO saw its role as contributing to international food security, and sought to have all governments, developed and developing, undertake policies and programs that would contribute to greater world food security. But government affirmations that policies affecting food production and reserves were following FAO's proposals did not assure food security either at national or household level, particularly among low income, food deficit countries.

The establishment of the IEFR (International Emergency Food Reserve) administered by the WFP, has helped to assure that food aid would be available on short notice to meet specific emergency situations. This institutional arrangement has helped improve the situation at the national level and often at household levels as well. But in the event of large scale emergency needs such as the current widespread and prolonged drought in Africa or in refugee camps of Pakistan or Somalia, food aid at IEFR levels have not been adequate. Often, deliveries to critical points of need could not be made owing to limitations of docks and transport, and internal security. In some cases, governments seem more concerned with political objectives than in meeting food needs of the populace.

In 1977 the WFC proposed that food short countries should develop national food sector strategies which would link food policies and farm policies and which would factor in the need for food aid, as an integral part of such strategies. The importance of foreign trade as a means of moderating gross swings in production and supply availability was also noted in the WFC paper. The idea of food sector strategies received support of the Ministerial meeting that year.

Then in the late 1970's and early 1980's the World Food Council went a step further and developed several papers for Ministerial discussion dealing with problems of food availability and distribution for those people who lacked incomes to buy adequate food at commercial prices. These papers candidly dealt with the proposition of subsidized food for a part of country populations. But, both developed and developing country representatives shied away from coming to grips with the kind of programs suggested by WFC's secretariat. Apparently, governments could agree on planning but were unable to commit themselves to actual programs which would entail large outlays, and formalize entitlements.

Early 1983, FAO unveiled another, more comprehensive, paper dealing with many aspects of food security and it was debated in FAO's Committee on Food Security which met in April that year. 1/ Since the paper not only dealt with various aspects of food security, but also with the respective roles of FAO vis a vis the WFC and the WFP, views among country representatives largely divided along North-South lines.

1/ See FAO's document: "The Director General Report on World Food Security: A Re-Appraisal of Concepts and Approaches; 1983 and Report on the Eighth Session of the Committee on Food Security, 1983, also published by FAO.

Another way of looking at food security from a national perspective is provided by a team of "independent" analysts in a paper done for the WFC for its 1984 Ministerial meeting. They depict two strategies in the search for food security at national levels: (1) An emphasis on increasing supplies and (2) an emphasis on food distribution and consumption. They hold that government policy makers need to consider the costs and benefits of either approach and to formulate policies accordingly. This dichotomy is not rigid; clearly, government policies might simultaneously encourage increased supplies and consumption.

The approaches to world food security taken toward the second half of the decade since the World Food Conference are more sophisticated than the production emphasis of the conference. Steps to increase production of foods are essential for most low income countries where there are food deficits. But it is now clear that national production strategies must be viewed within the context of national and international food systems and that trade and aid both have a role in closing food gaps.

The links between food security and general economic policies is analyzed in a recent World Bank paper largely authored by Shlomo Reutlinger which the Bank plans to publish as a policy paper on the subject. Reutlinger focuses attention on "transitory" food insecurity and "chronic" food insecurity. The paper points out that most nations make an effort to insulate the populace from food insecurity of either kind by moderating the price impact of shortages. Hence, in recent times most people in high income and middle income countries have enjoyed food security. Countries like the USSR, Saudi Arabia and South Korea have not been self-sufficient in basic grains for several years during the past decade, but the governments have paid the price for food imports when needed.

But many developing countries, because of rising prices and falling earnings could not pay for the imports needed during the decade to fill the country's food shortages.

For many of these countries and their people, transitory food insecurity, brought on by occasional harvest failures, now appears to be chronic. This is the situation of many countries in Africa.

For many other people in Asia and the poorer countries of the Middle East and Latin America, food insecurity has also become chronic. For them, employment and incomes are so low and uncertain, that they cannot pay for adequate diets at prices prevailing most of the time in their countries. They do not suffer the trauma of starvation, but the lingering effects of malnutrition. Perhaps, in those situations the gospel of incentive prices for producers needs to be linked with arrangements whereby the very poor could have some assurance of sharing in the increased harvests. Food security must reckon with the needs of both consumers and producers within a larger framework of economic growth widely shared.

Conclusions

In the decade since the World Food Conference of 1974, greatly increased attention has been directed to problems of world food security. There have been significant gains in political will and the allocation of resources for increasing food production and emergency food aid. But the emphasis on technologies of production, while important, have not sufficed. Two major shortcomings of the World Food Conference and the efforts it stimulated were: (1) the failure to recognize the relationshop between poverty and food insecurity and (2) the failure to view national and household food problems within a larger framework of food systems.

Some 800 million people have been added to the world population during this past decade, mostly in developing countries, and they are being fed. But the absolute numbers who are malnourished seem not diminished. Perhaps the poor and hungry will always be with us. Perhaps we need to face some harsh realities:

- There are governments in some developing countries that are corrupt, incompetent and for some, political security may have higher priority than food security.
- Some developing countries lack the natural resources and human resources to develop and sustain economies in which most of the populace will have incomes adequate for purchasing their household food needs.
- Large amounts of food aid, if properly distributed, can prevent the loss of lives in emergencies, but do not spark or sustain the kind of productive and distributive activities to alter the affects of pervasive poverty.

At the same time, there are some new realities that provide encouragement, if factored into efforts to improve food security:

- The world seems to have the means to produce enough food to feed itself. There are idle resources of people and productive capacities, to produce, preserve and transport food stuffs to the people and places in need.
- The private sector and the incentives for personal gain need to be given more adequate scope; but public policies and programs-are necessary to mitigate the harsh vagaries of weather faced by small farmers and rural workers who operate at subsistance levels.

- While there is much to be learned about such things as fragile soils, and genetics, we know enough about the physical and economic dimensions of food systems and of balancing the interests of producers and consumers to devise national food sector strategies, which link farm policies and food policies in a rational way.
- The world grows smaller and the plight of the hungry insinuate themselves in our homes. Public leaders in the U.S. and elsewhere can build on a community of concern for larger transfers of resources and know-how that are necessary for food priority countries to bring them closer to attaining national food security.

I began my comments with a reference to biblical concerns about food security. I will close with a reference to a biblical pasage from Isiah: "They shall beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruining hooks and nation shall not lift up sword against nation: neither shall they learn war any more." Perhaps, when all countries join together to move toward Isiah's vision of a just world society, there will be food security for all.